

Oxford Union Society.

| O. U. S. |

It will be interesting, in connection with Oxford stamps, to gather up what is known as to overprinted stamps of the O. U. S.

This overprint of the Oxford Union Society, which celebrated its eightieth anniversary last year, is the only instance in which the Postal Authorities have ever permitted a surcharge on the face of Government stamps, for private use.

The permission given in 1857 or 8 was withdrawn in 1870, after which time the surcharge or overprint was made on the back of the stamp.

It consists of the letters O. U. S. between two wavy lines running up and down the stamp, and occurs on the following issues:—

There is curiously no record in the minutes or accounts of the Oxford Union Society of any order to a local or other firm for this overprinting, or of payment for the same, from which it might justly be inferred that the surcharge was placed on the stamp before leaving the Government Office; if this were so, we should expect to find the surcharge under the gum, and it may be this is the case in some of the earlier imprints, but in nearly every instance in which I have removed those printed at the back, from the envelope, the wetting of the gum has removed the surcharge from the stamp to the envelope, which would seem to prove that the surcharge was placed on the stamp *after* it had received the gum.

There is no record apparently in existence to assist us, nor is there any means of ascertaining when the use of the surcharge ceased. The year 1882 has been named, but the existence of an envelope with a post-mark May 5th, 1885, proves clearly that they were so used up to that period.

That the Oxford Union Society should have been permitted so unique a privilege might appear singular, until one realizes that among the influential members of the Government, Cabinet Ministers were at every period to be found, who were life members of the Society; but it is more than strange that no record of such a permission can be found anywhere, and none of the actual performance of the work of printing.

The consumption of stamps must always have been heavy, of late years it has been enormous.

It is pretty well generally known that the Union Society stamps the letters of its subscribing members, and provides post cards and letter cards for their use.

The Steward, W. Gill, Esq., has most courteously supplied me with the figures for the year 1901.

The period of stamping letters in each term is sixty-two days. In the one hundred and eighty-six days of the three terms of the academic year, the Union stamped and posted for its members 122,094 communications at a cost for stamps of £475. 19s.

No record is kept of the number of letters stamped by members and visitors for themselves, but taking the very moderate computation of fifty a day, the total comes out at 9,300.

Thus in the three terms the Union Society sent to post no less than 131,394 stamped communications.

They are indeed remarkable figures and a contrast to the number posted in vacation, *i.e.*, for the remainder of the year, which are estimated to be about 15,400.

- 1857. In red, on face of stamp, lines $2\frac{1}{2}$ m.m. apart.
- 1870. In red, on back of stamp, lines $3\frac{1}{2}$ m.m. apart, wide surcharge.
- 1870. In red, on back of stamp, lines $2\frac{1}{2}$ m.m. apart, narrow surcharge.
- 1880. In carmine, on back of stamp, lines $2\frac{1}{2}$ m.m. apart.
- 1881. In carmine, on back of stamp, lines $3\frac{1}{2}$ m.m. apart.
- 1881. In violet, on back of stamp, lines $2\frac{1}{2}$ m.m. apart.

The letters should read upwards, though it is by no means uncommon to find the surcharge inverted.

The first and last dates are stated by Mr. H. L. Ewen, in *Stamps and Postmarks*, to be 15th October, 1859, and 29th October, 1882, but I have seen copies bearing postmarks as late as 1885.

It will be seen that this overprint occurs on various issues of the penny stamp. It is found on the issue of:—

- 1857. 1d. red, stars, on face of stamp, in red.
- 1864. 1d. red, plate numbers, on face and back of stamp, in red; on the later issues in bright carmine.
- 1880. 1d. Venetian red, on back of stamp, in carmine.
- 1881. 1d. lilac, fourteen pearls, on back of stamp, in carmine.
- 1881. 1d. lilac, sixteen pearls, on back of stamp, in violet.

1857. 1d. red stamp with stars in upper corners. The O. U. S. on this is fairly common. I have original covers with it, ranging from November 12th, 1860, to May 22nd, 1866, and doubtless many collectors possess earlier and later dates than these.

1864, 1d. reds. It is known on the following plate numbers, on the face of the stamp, 71, 72, 74, 76, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93,

95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 106, 110, 112, 113, 114, 117, 119, 125, 130, 133, 137, 139, 150, 156, 160, 205.

On the back of the stamp the surcharge occurs in both types, narrow and wide.

The narrow surcharge has been seen on the back of plate numbers 134, 174, 199, and 223.

The wide surcharge is more common and is found on back of plate numbers 107, 119, 124, 134, 136, 146, 150, 155, 160, 162, 163, 164, 166, 183, 197, 204, 205, 212, 213 (these last three with the surcharge reading downwards).

On the back of the 1880 Venetian red stamps, I have seen the surcharge on letters dated May 2nd, 1880, May 6th, and May 8th, 1881, and June 12th, 1881. I have one on original letter, June 2nd, 1881.

The 1881 lilac stamp, with fourteen dots, I have dated October 16th, 1881, and October 30th, 1881, on original envelopes.

The succeeding lilac stamp with sixteen dots I have seen on originals, date February 12th, 1882, April 22nd, 1882, May 28th, 1882, and I have original covers in my collection addressed to Messrs. T. and G. Mallam, under date respectively, June 2nd, 1881, and May 5th, 1885. This latter is a very late date, and covered a letter from an undergraduate at Merton.